

FLORA AND FAUNA

136 In both flora and fauna the Great Cau-
137 casus does not especially differ from Central
and Mediterranean Europe, while Trans-
Caucasia exhibits a number of specific features
characteristic of the Anatolo-Iranian plateaus,
of which it forms a part. Therefore, in this
chapter only the more specific features will
be given particular attention.

Flora

137 In contra-distinction to the high mount-
ain systems of the Near East, in which the
Caucasus is an important link, the Caucasus
presents the agreeable aspect of a well-forest-
ed mountainous area. Exceptions, however,
are central, eastern, and southeastern Dages-
tan and the two vast volcanic areas of the Anti-
Caucasus; the Gegam mountains west of Lake
Sevan, and the north central part of the Anti-
Caucasus around Lake Toporovan, south of the
Trialet'ian range. The reason for the absence
of forest vegetation in those areas is probably
less the human factor, which in all countries
of ancient culture has wrought an awful devas-
tation, but the natural conditions -- the insuf-
ficiency of the soil in those areas, and climatic
factors, especially the deficiency in precipita-
tion.

Trees of natural growth and regular size
are found in the Caucasus on higher latitudes

Fauna

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Wild life in the Caucasus is naturally richer than in the Alps or many Central European mountainous areas. The reasons are mainly to be sought in the considerably lesser degree of density of the population as found in the Caucasus. Thus, species long extinct in the Alps or Central Europe have been preserved down to this day.

The Caucasian bear lives in the lower altitudes and rarely goes higher than 1500 m. He stays in the zone of the fruit trees and shrubs. There in the regions of the nut forests he has strong competition from the wild boar which occasionally attacks a single bear and chases him away; sometimes when the bear climbs a tree the boar prevents him from coming down and picking up the nuts he has shaken from the tree. This has been observed in Abkhazian forests. The wild boars, which usually move in large groups, like the thickets and the reed jungles along the rivers. A dangerous beast of prey is the lynx which also is found in the forests of Abkhazia. There are also wolves, which, however, are not confined to Abkhazia but may be seen anywhere on Caucasian territory. In the higher regions of the Great Caucasus the chamois is as much at home as in the Alps, but here it is of course more frequent. A kind of wild goat, similar to the

- 136 ibex, is the tur; like the chamois, it is found in the higher regions of the mountains. The few families of bison which still existed around the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the forests along the tributaries of the upper Kuban, at the foot of the Elbrus Massif, have apparently died out, probably during the time of the revolutionary wars.

In the southeastern part of the entire area a very different type of fauna appears. Thus, the tiger prefers the thickets at the foot of the Talysh mountains, but rarely ventures into the plains of lower Trans-Caucasia; however, a smaller relative of his, the leopard, is quite frequently found in the plains of the lower Kura. In the same area, the hyena and jackal are found in fairly large numbers. The jackal occasionally crosses the crest-line of the Great Caucasus and penetrates the forests of the northern slopes; but this happens only in the eastern half of the entire system, and chiefly in Dagestan, where the jackal fits well into the ecology. The bezoar goat, living in the mountains of the Anti-Caucasus, should be mentioned; there is also a species of antelope called djeyran (Russian; which is simply the Turco-Mongolian term for gazelle or antelope), which lives in the steppe regions of the Trans-Caucasian plains. The porcupine is found in the sub-tropical Talysh region.

Bird life is rather insignificant and does not exhibit any specific features, with the

.136 possible exception that the average number of birds appears to be very small. (I myself when in the area, did not see one big bird of prey such as the eagle or the berküt [aquila fulva or chrysaetos], a powerful and beautiful bird of prey which is richly represented in Turkestan and found in Anatolia as well, where it can occasionally be seen tracing circles in the air above the city of Ankara.) The pheasant should not be forgotten, especially since it is originally a native of Colchis, if it bears its name rightfully; the name has been linked to that of the Phasis river, the Rioni.

In the wintertime, however, a multitude of water birds, consisting of most Eurasian species from ducks to swans and cranes, lives in the Kyzyl-Aghach, and Lenkoran areas. Not long ago the Kyzyl-Aghach area was made a national park--the Kirov Park--for the preservation of wild water birds. It is a hexagon of about 1600 km. 2, and is the largest national park in the Soviet Union.

In the entire area of Trans-Caucasia both the lizards and snakes are frequently found, of varieties which are typical of the neighboring areas of Anatolia and Iran.

The Caspian fish periodically travel in huge numbers to the Kura river to spawn. They migrate a considerable distance from the sea up the lower course of the Kura and occasionally the Araxes river. The species chiefly represented are the sturgeon and its close relative

•136 the sevryuga; the Caspian salmon, the shamai (also: chabai, chamai), which is a fat variety of herring; and many others. In the rivers, creeks, and lakes of the mountainous region, trout are commonly found.

Among the inferior animals mention should be made of two kinds typical of the semi-arid and arid zones: the locust, often known by its Turkic name saryncha or sarancha (also in Russian), and an arachnoid, the phalanga spider. The grasshopper is famous for the threat it constitutes to the crops whenever this insect appears in great masses. The phalanga, quite common in these areas, is a close relative of the scorpion, which is also not unknown here. The phalanga may also be found in or near human dwellings; its bite is very poisonous, even dangerous, during late spring, especially May.